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X-Sender: chris@ted.com@mail.ted.com
Date: Wed, 20 Mar 2002 21:08:36 -0800
To: David Bolling <david@wholeearthmag.com>
From: Chris Anderson <chris@ted.com>
Subject: Re: Ongoing conversations
Cc: remy@well.com
X-RCPT-TO: <david@wholeearthmag.com>
Status: U

David, your email makes a great deal of sense. I totally understand why you could feel we're jumping the gun a little. And it's true that my excitement sometimes gets the better of me.

The way I'm thinking about this is that the two scenarios you outline in 1) kind of amount to the same thing. There would be no point in Sapling spending any further money on Whole Earth if it didn't hope to help rebuild a high-circulation, influential and profitable/sustainable magazine. The way we get there is to try putting some ideas into effect in a special issue of the magazine. The trouble is, we're all agreed Whole Earth needs not just cosmetic, but radical changes. If we just guest edited an issue it would tell us nothing about the future potential of the magazine... So, the question we are asking is whether, and in what circumstances we could get behind a relaunch of the magazine.

The answer in my mind, is that we can fund a relaunch only in the following circumstances:
- there is new talent available we have confidence in.
- the existing team are excited about the potential of the relaunch and are ready to get 100% behind it.
- everyone agrees we can go ahead and redesign the magazine from the ground up, based on input from all parties concerned.
- we settle on an editorial vision that every team member is excited by.
- we have a business plan everyone is bought into.
- we succeed in winning over a critical core of existing Whole Earth readers.
- we succeed in convincing potential new readers that the new-look magazine is really exciting.

There are a lot of tough hurdles here to overcome. Ultimately the only way to get to certainty about whether this can work is to try an issue. So that's the plan we'll be putting to the Point Foundation: That we will fund a radical relaunch, based on bringing in some new team members who will working hard with the existing team, under your operational leadership.

If, after getting out this issue, it's clear the majority existing readers hate it, and/or the Point Foundation hates it, and/or we are unsatisfied with the issue or the process or the

prospects, we will not continue the relationship. So, as in any relaunch there is certainly the risk it fails. I would argue Whole Earth should embrace that risk.

Our hope, and intention, and belief is that the relaunch will lead eventually to a successful, profitable six-figure circulation magazine.

I apologize for rushing the process. It's hard not to do this when all parties are separated geographically, when I'm supposed to be on vacation, and when there's a clock ticking. Your role in this going forward is crucial, and from what I know of you and the others, I think you will truly enjoy working with them. Before anything gets signed with anyone, you must make up your mind on whether you support bringing these people in -- the job offers will come from you and/or the Point Foundation. Without your support we won't fund the project.

But I do hope you end up agreeing with the strong belief I currently have -- that there is an extraordinary piece of serendipity at work here. Because of an unusual set of circumstances, a superb, proven team is available and ready to go. Do some of your own due diligence, of course. But if you agree, there isn't a moment to lose to pull them in and put them to work.

I hope this makes sense. I hope you can take the view that: Yes, this is a weird process, BUT the potential upside justifies a leap of faith...

I'll bet you that in three years' time you and I will have a drink somewhere celebrating one of the decade's most surprising and energizing publishing success stories...!

I'll be happy to try to organize a phone conversation if that would help. Otherwise, enjoying spending time with Jim, Michael and, hopefully, Laura too.

All best,

- Chris

P.S. Sometime, I'd love your comments on what you like and dislike about my and Michael's comments on editorial... I see this is as an open-ended conversation. The best way forward will eventually emerge!

At 04:16 PM 3/20/02 -0800, you wrote:

> Chris:
>
> I found many of your ideas exciting, daring, visionary, and I welcome and applaud them. I think you bring a creative vision to match your financial resources.
>
> What is missing from the picture so far, however, is a recognition of the need for process before product, and an understanding of the foundational requirement that we build a relationship before we rebuild a magazine.
>
> I have some difficulty, therefore, with the unleashed enthusiasm your email chain is generating. I've met Jim Daly once, briefly, and I've never met Michael or Laura so all of this has about it the feeling of a team of unknown contractors descending on a house to initiate a remodel while the occupants are still inside, unaware that a contract has been signed.
>
> In our case, there are numerous relationship questions to be asked and answered before I'm comfortable moving on to the exciting work of building a stronger Whole Earth.
>
> I have no question that we can, together, reshape, re-birth, relaunch the magazine. I think we have a clear general vision of what needs to be done and the details will emerge through the creative and exciting process of generating new ideas.
>
> My concern is the process by which we get there. As publisher of Whole Earth, I'm responsible not just for running the magazine, but for creating a climate of trust, inclusion, collaboration and mutual commitment. I have worked hard over the last several months to nurse Whole Earth away from a somewhat dysfunctional and autocratic, top-down management style to create a team. I think I've been successful, the team is functioning now, with a higher degree of morale and efficiency than has been the case for a long time. I don't want to lose that awakened spirit.
>
> This staff has a strong commitment to, and a deep investment in, Whole Earth and what it stands for. Preserving that commitment and the trust it's built on is one of my highest priorities. So, bringing new people into the fold without first establishing relationship and defining concomitant roles, responsibilities and authority runs the profound risk of damaging the existing trust relationship. I'm sure you understand that.
>
> So here's what I see we need to do up front.
>
> 1. Define, first, just what we're doing here.
>
> Is Sapling supporting and underwriting a guest edited issue of Whole Earth with the understanding that this one issue is a test and if all goes well we continue?
>
> Or is Sapling gearing up for a full-blown commitment with the first issue?
>
> There's been some confusion in my mind over that question, perhaps because I haven't been involved in all your discussions with Danica. I am assuming that the latter scenario is the one in your sights, but either scenario raises important questions about staffing and relationship that need to be addressed.
>
> 2. Meet with all the important players as soon as possible to have frank, open discussion about

mutual visions, personal hopes and structural arrangements.

Danica has just informed me, as I write this, that an effort is underway to get Michael out to California. That's great. Notwithstanding the discomfort expressed above, I have to say I was impressed with his response to your memo.

Danica and I are trying to set up a meeting with Jim for next week, so that relationship can begin to develop very soon.

I don't know anything about Laura, but one thing that would be enlightening for us is to have some back issues of B2 as visual reference guides to better understand your design vision. Regrettably, I can't find old issues anywhere. Any idea where we could get some?

3. Develop and agree on the components of a plan, and on a process to carry out the plan we agree on.

In all my business experience I've always committed plans and ideas to paper before concluding a deal. That way, even among the best of friends, there is no danger of misunderstanding, misinterpretation or reinterpretation. I can only assume you share the same experience.

This is all, I'm sure, quite obvious to you, but I don't see it, so far, as part of the conversation we've been having and for me, at least, it's where the conversation starts.

Please take all this in the spirit in which it's intended: great excitement about a powerful collaboration, and healthy caution about that collaboration until we're clear on the process.

Thanks, and I look forward to more rounds of this conversation.

David
--
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